

During the Structural Funds' 2000-2006 programming period, 95 % of the Union's mountain regions are eligible for support under either Objective 1 or Objective 2.

For the period after 2006 the Commission proposed a reform of cohesion policy in the third progress report on economic and social cohesion, adopted on 18 February 2004⁽¹⁾, which it formally sent to Parliament and to the Council. The Commission proposes that territorial cohesion should from now on form an integral part of cohesion policy.

The Commission proposes that the specific characteristics of regions with a natural handicap should be taken into account in the new generation of regional programmes. For example, it is proposed that regions with a permanent handicap could be eligible for a maximum rate of Community financing, above that which would apply to other regions.

Regarding rural development, an important sphere of activity for mountain regions, the Commission also made a number of proposals in its communication 'building our common future – policy challenges and budgetary means of the enlarged Union 2007-2013'⁽²⁾. For example, the Commission proposes a single instrument which would contribute inter alia towards improving the environment, the countryside and quality of life in rural areas.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2004) 107 final.

⁽²⁾ COM(2004) 101 final.

(2004/C 84 E/0746)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0716/04

**by Luis Berenguer Fuster (PSE)
and Anna Terrón i Cusí (PSE) to the Commission**

(10 March 2004)

Subject: Radio alarms

The problem of jamming is increasing exponentially due to the spectacular growth of the private security sector, and particularly sales of radio alarms, with security firms competing to under-price, so as to obtain the largest share of the market, ignoring the fact that alarms are security systems.

Does the Commission intend to take any steps to regulate this sector, so as to plug the existing legal gap?

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission

(19 April 2004)

As the Honourable Member points out, the market for surveillance services that is offered to the public is growing. These services are competing on both quality and price aspects.

The Commission is, however, not aware that there are currently problems with the quality and reliability of such services that are attributable to congestions in and/or jamming of the radio frequency spectrum that they use.

This issue was discussed with Member States in the context of Directive 1999/5/EC⁽¹⁾ (the R & TTE Directive) in September 2000. At the time, it was judged that additional regulations to protect specific applications such as security alarms from harmful interference and to ensure access to emergency services were not necessary as it was deemed that market forces would already ensure this.

The Commission however intends to raise this issue again in the next meeting with Member States, scheduled for June 2004, so as to assess whether recent developments would require the Commission to reconsider the matter.

Furthermore, the Commission is currently studying the harmonisation across the EU of conditions of use of the radio spectrum for short-range devices including security alarms. Part of this analysis will consider how best to enable the effective operation of such devices via agreed technical parameters and appropriate radio spectrum frequencies.

(¹) Directive 1999/5/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 1999 on radio equipment and telecommunications terminal equipment and the mutual recognition of their conformity, OJ L 91, 7.4.1999.

(2004/C 84 E/0747)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0720/04

by Marjo Matikainen-Kallström (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(10 March 2004)

Subject: Export subsidies for oats

Oats are grown on a very large scale in Finland. With the aid of export subsidies they have been exported to, among other places, Canada and the United States. At present the Commission is unwilling to pay export subsidies because cereals are in short supply in the EU area on account of last season's crop failures. Finland was one place where crops did not fail, with the result that farmers' grain bins are full of good oats.

Since oats are not used in central Europe, there is no significant market for them in southern Europe and other parts of the EU that would in any event need to import cereals. The Finnish oat harvest is at the moment lying in the farmers' grain bins because oats do not go to the EU regions that need cereals and the substantially lower export subsidies are insufficient to enable them to be exported to North America. It ought to be possible to export oats to North America because they are used there in massive quantities.

What specific measures will the Commission take, and within what time-frame, to enable oats to be exported to North America? Will it continue to pay export subsidies for oats and raise them back to their former level with a view to reviving full-scale exports to North America? If so, within what time-frame? This matter is urgent.

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(2 April 2004)

Contrary to all other cereals, the EU had a normal 2003/2004 harvest of oats both in terms of quantity and quality, leading to a certain export surplus from Finland and Sweden. Indeed, the EU cereal production in the EU decreased from 209 million tonnes to 183 million tonnes. For the first time in many years, the EU overall production fell significantly below internal consumption (about 190 million tonnes). This led to a critical supply situation, in particular for feed grains.

The Commission recognised that additional internal demand for oats is limited since oats have limitations in normal animal feed formulation. Consequently, the Commission opened the oats export tender on 15 October 2003, allowing subsidized exports as from the beginning of the oats harvest. Until 12 March 2004, the Commission granted export refunds for a total quantity of 247 840 tonnes. This quantity constitutes a major part of the oats surplus during the campaign.